



PENINSULA FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INC.

Mornington Peninsula, Victoria, Australia

NEWSLETTER: SEPTEMBER 2017

Working Bee at Wallace Reserve 16th July

Wallace Reserve is a 3.7 ha reserve amongst houses between Heatherhill Rd and the Stony Point rail line. For our annual Club working bee we joined the Friends group for a session of weeding in preparation for a planting day involving local schoolchildren. About ten volunteers in total spent a few hours clearing an area along Wallace Avenue, removing mostly exotic grasses and African Ivy. After a short guided walk around the Reserve a sausage sizzle was our reward.



Our morning's work. Photo - Lee Denis

The Reserve was formerly a gravel pit - outcrops of the ubiquitous Baxter Sandstone (now called Red Bluff Sandstone) are still to be seen - and used as a rubbish dump, later a pine plantation managed by Frankston High School. Pine trees of several species are still extant. The Friends group has been working for the past 12 years to control the spread of weeds and re-introduce indigenous plant species.

The Reserve is managed by Frankston Council, with assistance from school and TAFE students.

After a couple of hours work we had cleared sufficient area for the planting (which was successfully carried out a couple of weeks later), so Friends member Melinda led us on a short tour of the Reserve, showing us on the way a number of native orchid species, including Nodding and Trim Greenhoods, as well as Banded Greenhoods in flower. Leaves of a number of other orchid species were also seen - including Tongue Orchids and possibly Helmets.



Pterostylis sanguinea. Photo - Lee Denis

The Reserve is obviously well used by local residents, and is also home to birds including Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoos which favour the pine plantation. — **Lee Denis**

Birding at Edithvale Wetlands 3rd July

Only three of us showed up at Edithvale Wetlands on the coldest day of the winter so far. Robin Clarey very kindly opened up the hide for us, so we had a great view of Swans and Chestnut Teal in abundance, and not much else. A few months before Spotless Crakes and the Magpie Goose had been easily seen, but not so today.

We then crossed the road and walked around the wetlands there. There were no birds on the water, but we did get

good close up views through the golf course fence of Straw-necked Ibis and a few other birds, and on a dead tree a Black-shouldered Kite posed obligingly for us. The Swamp Harrier was working away.

Frozen but still optimistic, and with the black clouds gathering, we stopped off at Austins Rd on the way home. Nothing doing there at all. I was pleased to scuttle off home for lunch. — **Judy Smart**

Birding at the Village Glen 7th August

For July birding we visited the Village Glen in Rosebud at the invitation of Val Ford. Ominous weather forecasts deterred all but the hardiest, but apart from some early showers the day was mostly fine and in fact there were periods of sunshine. A chilly wind was persistent however.



Photo - Lee Denis

We have seen the reports of Village Glen bird observations in Val's Birdlife newsletter, and while not doubting their veracity in the slightest, have been, shall we say, intrigued. On this day all of our questions were put to rest, with both numbers and species of birds observed living up to the venue's reputation. On a less than ideal birding day we ended with 47 birds, including some surprising ones.

Our walk did include a swing along the margin of Tootgarook Swamp, where we saw both Nankeen Kestrel and Black-shouldered Kite, two species of Ibis, and some Shelducks, amongst others, but the bulk of the sightings were made within the complex.

Sightings ranged from Little Pied Cormorants at the small lake opposite the administration centre, through a Great Egret and a handful of Hardheads at a larger lake, to a Common Bronzewing perched on a roof. They included both Australian and Little Raven, Swamp Harrier, King Parrot, and capping it all off a Tawny Frogmouth perched in a leafless street tree in front of houses.

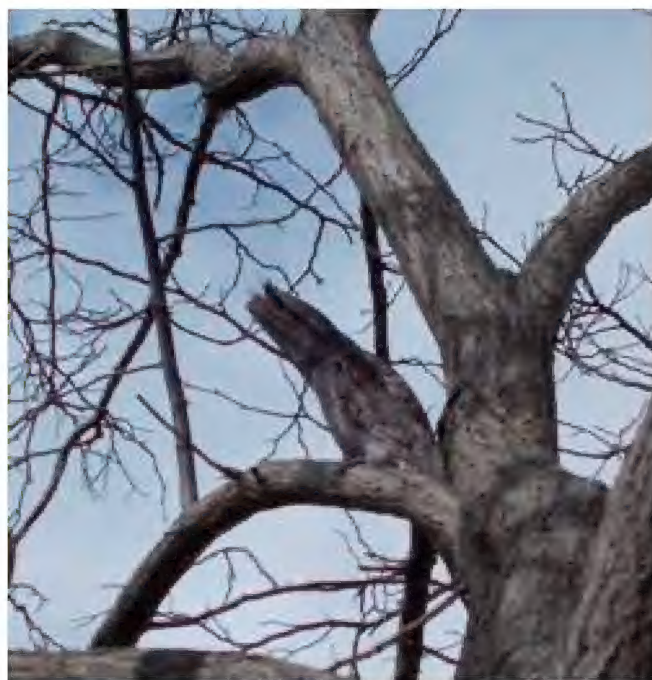


Photo - Velimir Dragic

The extensive flowering plants, both indigenous and exotic, and the vegetated banks of Chinamans Creek which winds along the Village's boundary, provide plenty of habitat for the wide variety of birds observed. The total bird list for the Village includes over 100 species, and after our day there we can well believe it. — **Lee Denis**.

Bird List For Village Glen, Rosebud 7th August 2017

Australian Shelduck	Black-shouldered Kite	Common Bronzewing	Red Wattlebird	Australian Raven
Australian Wood Duck	Swamp Harrier	Galah	Little Wattlebird	Little Raven
Pacific Black Duck	Nankeen Kestrel	Rainbow Lorikeet	Crescent Honeyeater	House Sparrow
Hardhead	Purple Swampphen	Australian King-Parrot	Eastern Spinebill	Welcome Swallow
Little Pied Cormorant	Dusky Moorhen	Eastern Rosella	Eastern Yellow Robin	Common Blackbird
Australian Pelican	Eurasian Coot	Tawny Frogmouth	Grey Shrike-thrush	Common Starling
White-faced Heron	Masked Lapwing	Laughing Kookaburra	Magpie-Lark	Common Myna
Great Egret	Silver Gull	Superb Fairy-wren	Grey Fantail	
Australian White Ibis	Rock Dove	Spotted Pardalote	Willie Wagtail	
Straw-necked Ibis	Spotted Turtle-Dove	Brown Thornbill	Australian Magpie	

Birding at The Balcombe Creek Estuary 4th September

Our planned birding outing to The Briars had to be abandoned because we were locked out (again, this time for "high winds"), so the simplest alternative was to walk the boardwalk along Balcombe Creek down to Mt Martha. Birds seemed to be scarce, so the final count of 34 came as a surprise.



Photo - Velimir Dragic

With the intervals between bird sightings being fairly long we were able to appreciate the vibrant deep yellow of the Hedge Wattle (*Acacia paradoxa*) along the path; this shrub

comes into its own at this time of year — the rest of the year it is just dull as well as being extremely prickly. Birds were sporadic along the boardwalk, but included the usual bush suspects like Grey Fantail, Yellow Robin, Golden Whistler etcetera. Some time was occupied locating a Striated Pardalote whose call was heard, before Rog finally managed a glimpse. Our members with a geological interest were meanwhile diverted to look at the quarry wall.

At the Mt Martha end the winds really were high, as was the tide, so the only birds spotted adjacent to the bridge were a few Little Pied Cormorants; on the beach were only Silver Gulls and Crested Terns visible under the road bridge. I personally found more interest in the display in the old campground building of the fascinating story of the Short-finned Eels and their epic migration. — **Lee Denis**

Bird List For Balcombe Creek 4 September 2017

Australian Wood Duck	Eastern Rosella	New Holland Honeyeater
Little Pied Cormorant	Laughing Kookaburra	Eastern Yellow Robin
Australian White Ibis	White-throated Treecreeper	Golden Whistler
Straw-necked Ibis	Superb Fairy-wren	Grey Shrike-thrush
Purple Swampphen	Spotted Pardalote	Magpie-Lark
Dusky Moorhen	Striated Pardalote	Grey Fantail
Masked Lapwing	White-browed Scrubwren	Grey Butcherbird
Silver Gull	Brown Thornbill	Australian Magpie
Crested Tern	Red Wattlebird	Little Raven
Galah	Noisy Miner	Welcome Swallow
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Yellow-faced Honeyeater	Common Blackbird
Rainbow Lorikeet		

Speaker: Andree Austin *The Red-capped Plovers of Western Port Bay* 9th August

The Beach-nesting birds program of Birdlife aims to help beach-nesting birds — hooded plovers, red-capped plovers, sooty and pied oystercatchers - to improve their breeding success, by monitoring their nests, engaging the community, and encouraging co-existence with the public who share their beaches in summer during nesting season. The Hooded Plovers have been the main focus of this program for the past ten years, as they are struggling to survive and are on the verge of being endangered. Beach-nesting birds lay their eggs on a scrape in the sand, out in the open, and so are very vulnerable. Humans can walk on their nests without seeing them, dogs can eat them or chase them away from the nest, the eggs die without a parent on the nest, foxes, ravens and gulls can predate them, or when beaches are busy the birds are unable to feed on

the shoreline.



All Photos courtesy of Birdlife

capped Plovers of Western Port, as it was felt their population is in decline, but there was not much information about them. They are more common than Hooded Plovers, and nest on inland lakes, salt marshes and wetlands as well as beaches. Two populations were monitored – Pt Leo/Shoreham and Balnarring. Their territories were walked twice a week, and numbers of birds, nests, eggs, fledglings and also threats such as dogs off lead were recorded. They were challenging to monitor, as they are more mobile than Hooded Plovers, and move up and down the beach, and are also keeping company with Red-necked Stints, who look very similar. One way to tell them apart is their feeding action – the Red-capped Plovers run and peck, the Red-necked Stints have a sewing machine action.



Red-capped Plover at nest (foreground)

They usually lay two eggs, incubate for a month, and then take 35 days to fledge, during which time they are like a fluff ball on long legs. The parents divide their duties by day and night – the female sits on the nest by day, the male by night. It was observed that at night both sexes were predated equally, probably by foxes, but during the day the males were more likely to be taken, perhaps because of their brighter colouring.

Beach goers could not understand the logic of beach nesting, and suggested to Andrée and other monitors that the birds were stupid. The pros of beach nesting are the open habitat, with advance warning of approaching threats, their heavy camouflage, and their effective defences such as the broken wing act, and leading predators away from the nest. The cons are the high human use of beaches, high tides, windy weather, extreme heat, and predators such as foxes, gulls and ravens. On one occasion Andrée saw over 220 ravens at Cotters Beach at Wilsons Prom, and no plovers.



One idea to protect beach-nesting birds is by fencing off nests, and providing little sun shelters over nests. Unfortunately these also attract people, foxes and ravens. The conclusions from this year's monitoring: Pt Leo/Shoreham – from 22 nests, 40 eggs laid, 10 chicks produced, 3 fledglings survived. Balnarring – 10 nests, 19 eggs, 8 chicks, 2 fledglings. Some birds nested early, before the holiday season, and they had more success. The challenge ahead is that there are too many unknowns. Is breeding success low? Are they declining? So far they have not been banded, which requires a lot of input, and they are known to travel.

The Hooded Plovers of the Mornington Peninsula had their best breeding season in recent history last summer – 13 fledglings, up from 4 fledglings the year before, and 1 fledgling in 2014/15. One factor is the first year of dogs being banned from the ocean beaches. Another is more fox control, which is also related to the dog ban, as foxes could not be baited while dogs were on the beaches. It is encouraging news, but too early to say that the birds are sustainable.

Birdlife are looking for more volunteers for next summer, for the Red Caps and the Hoodies, and can be contacted at hploversmornpen@gmail.com, or check the MyBeachbird Portal. — **Judy Smart**

Speaker: Dr Kate Charlton-Robb **Current Research on Dolphins and Marine Mammals** **13th September**

Dr Kate Charlton-Robb is a geneticist by training, and while researching dolphins for her PhD came to the conclusion that the bottlenose dolphins in Port Philip Bay were a separate species from those in Bass Strait and elsewhere. These are now known as Burrnun dolphins – *Tursiops australis*.

Previously there were two Australian bottlenose dolphin species: *Tursiops truncatus* – Common Bottlenose Dolphin, found around Australia and worldwide, and larger than the Burrnun at 3m average length; and *Tursiops aduncus* - the Indo-Pacific bottle nose, which is small than the Burrnun

at 2.7 metres, and found in tropical waters. Kate studied the skulls of the two local species, their DNA and measurements to come to her conclusions.

There are three populations of Burruran dolphins – Port Philip Bay, Gippsland Lakes, and Tasmania. The Port Philip Bay Burrurans are a separate population and do not mix with the other populations. They number about 120 and have low genetic variation. The Gippsland Lakes population is about 65, all females and calves, and some of the males from Tasmania migrate to the Gippsland Lakes for the winter, to breed with the Gippsland Lakes females. Population counts use photography to distinguish the individuals, by blotches, markings and particularly fin variations.

Because of their low numbers, the Burruran dolphins are listed as ‘endangered’ under the Flora & Fauna Guarantee Act. The threats to them are all human caused – jet skis disrupting them or injuring them, plastic ingestion, and noise from our boating activity. Kate played recordings of their communication with each other, by ‘clicking’ sounds. They rely on sound to navigate, communicate, locate prey and recognise individuals.

The females calve every three to four years, and the mother and calf stay together for three years. Researchers at the Foundation are looking at historical records to check for long term population trends.

Other marine mammals the Foundation studies are seals – they have cameras recording their activities at their haul out site in the Bay, researching disturbance to them, and a small population (about thirty) of Common dolphins – *Delphinus delphis*, who are resident off shore between Mornington and Mt Martha. These are smaller again at 2m.

Other Victorian marine mammals are the Blue Whale, from near Portland; Killer whales, Southern Right whales and Humpback whales, all of which visit Port Philip Bay. The Marine Mammal Foundation has three aims- Applied Research, Education, by an Outreach program, particularly to schools, and Conservation. Other current research is into social network structures of the Port Philip and Gippsland Lakes Burrurans, and vessel impact at the Gippsland Lakes.— **Judy Smart**

The Marine Mammal Foundation can be found at www.marinemammal.org.au.

Excursion to Long Forest NCR & Melton Botanic Gardens 12th August

On a fine mild day, albeit with an at times gusty wind, two carloads of Field Nats set out for Long Forest Nature Conservation Reserve, just out of Melton. As usual, getting through the city was the first task; once this was accomplished we could begin to enjoy the day. The Reserve covers 600 hectares, and contains part of an unusual mallee community.



Lignotubers of Bull Mallee. Photo - Lee Denis

According to the Victorian Heritage Database: *This disjunct Mallee community, dominated by the Bull Mallee (Eucalyptus behriana), is the only true southern Australian Mallee known to grow anywhere in Australia east of the Great Dividing Range. The nearest Mallee communities are some 180 km north west. The existence of*

this vegetation so distant from all other Mallee communities is of exceptional interest as it throws light on the patterns of vegetation across southern Australia. The stand is approximately 2048 ha. and is surrounded and buffered by low woodland, comprised of Red Box, (E. polyanthemus) Grey Box (E. moluccana) and Yellow Gum. (E. leucoxylon), Specimens were collected by Mueller from this area. and the area is classified by the National Trust Landscape Register.

Starting at the Happy Valley car park (after finding some Dwarf Greenhoods *Pterostylis nana* at the front gate) we walked a loop incorporating the Mallee, Old House, Gravelly and Happy Valley Tracks. As advertised, the Bull Mallee was east to find; also noted were Moonah (*Melaleuca lanceolata*), *Acacia pycnantha* and *A. acinacea*, the Tree Violet *Melicactus dentatus*, and another unusual Eucalypt, *E. baueriana* (Blue Box). This latter mainly occurs in East Gippsland and NSW near-coastal forests, according to Leon Costermans. Many of the eucalypts were host to the Box Mistletoe, *Amyema miquellii*.

The Reserve is said to be home to sixteen species of saltbush, of which the Fragrant Saltbush *Rhagodia parabolica* — surely named by someone with a sense of humour — makes the most impact on the senses.

Bird count numbered only 19, but included a couple of species not seen on the Peninsula - White-winged Chough and Yellow-tufted Honeyeater. We saw the nesting burrows of the migratory Rainbow Bee-eaters in the bank of the

creek — the birds themselves should be back in the spring/summer.

The geology of the Reserve is also of interest — more on that below.

On the way home we stopped in at the Melton Botanic Gardens. These gardens are fairly new, created by volunteers over the last seven or eight years. They are heavily, but not exclusively, planted with Australian native plants, including a good selection of Grevilleas and a Eucalypt arboretum featuring a number of Western Australian species. There is also a large wetland area next to the Western Freeway, with an expanse of open water, fed by Ryans Creek.



Grevillea magnifica at Melton Botanic Gardens.
Photo - Lee Denis

There were actually more birds at the Gardens than in Long Forest, including several honeyeaters, Red-rumped Parrots and a Darter. We were amused to note that the houses across the road had practically no gardens at all — I suppose there is no need to maintain your own garden when there is such a wonderful garden across the road. Access to the Gardens is not restricted, and some picnic facilities are available.



Darter at Melton Botanic Gardens.
Photo - Heather Ducat

A major problem at the moment is lack of rainfall — ironically it began to rain as we were leaving — while many of the plants have been badly affected by frost recently. But this garden is obviously a labor of love for the Friends group and will only get better and better as the plantings establish further. — **Lee Denis.**

A Short Pictorial Story of Long Forest Geology

Velimir Dragic

Geological history of this region began about 500 MYA - when Ordovician marine sedimentary rocks were formed. They vary from coarse sandstones to finer grain shales and slates.

About 100 MY later, during the Devonian period, these rocks were folded, compressed and lifted above the sea level. An active volcanic period occurred at that time and molten lava filled valleys and formed basalt plains.

Another 100 MY later, [in the Permian Period], a movement of a huge ice-sheet collected, transported and dumped a mix of mud and stones, forming *tillite*. It is a conglomerate of quartz, granite, other various, irregular stones and mud, hardened into sandstone – called **Bacchus Marsh formation**.



Tillite – Bacchus Marsh formation



Grey glacial deposit and sedimentary slate on creek bank covered with *Carpobrotus* (pigface)



A sedimentary slate on "Gravelly track"



Deformed soft-sediment structures in glacial-marine sediments



Newer volcanic outcrops on "Mallee Track" in Happy Valley
(All photos: Velimir Dragic)

Excursion to Bunyip State Park 17th September

On the first sunny day of Spring, seemingly the first sunny day since Autumn, we teamed up with Ringwood Field Naturalists Club to visit Bunyip State Park. On previous occasions we have been to the western part of Bunyip, to Mortimer and Buttongrass picnic areas, but this time we went to the more eastern part, Lawson Falls area.

We started at Nangara Reserve, an ex-quarry, then moved on to Lawson Falls picnic area, but not the Falls themselves.



Roadside vegetation. Photo - Lee Denis

We had a feast of wattles, in profuse flower. I counted *Acacia dealbata*, *A. genistifolia*, *A. melanoxylon*, *A.*

mucronata, *A. myrtifolia*, *A. obliquinervia*, *A. oxycedrus*, *A. provincialis*, and *A. verticillata*, but I am sure there were more.

We only saw one orchid for the day – *Pterostylis nutans*, the Nodding Greenhood, but lots of flowers, particularly on slashed roadside areas. There was lots of mauve from *Tetralthea ciliata* and the clumsily named *Euryomyrtus ramosissima*, formerly known as *Baeckea*. The handsome flat pea, *Platylobium formosum* was handsome, and others of interest were the local *Boronia muelleri*, Dusty Miller (*Spyridium parvifolium*), *Correa reflexa*, *Dampiera stricta*, *Phebalium bilobum*, *Zieria arborescens*, *Clematis aristata* and another heavily named little white star flower – white marianth – *Rhytidosporum procumbens*. The highlight of the day for me was finding Victoria's only tree Grevillea, *Grevillea barklyana*, which had just started flowering and had a resident Crescent Honeyeater feeding on it. — **Judy Smart**

A stroll around a nature walk kicked off the day with the highlight being a male Rose Robin, seen by some but unfortunately not all (at least one of our group missed seeing a lifer). The plant people kept checking out creepers, shrubs and trees but apparently, most were found to be the same species as can be seen on the peninsula.

When we moved to another area for lunch, the lure of an indigenous grevillea didn't deliver until after we had left

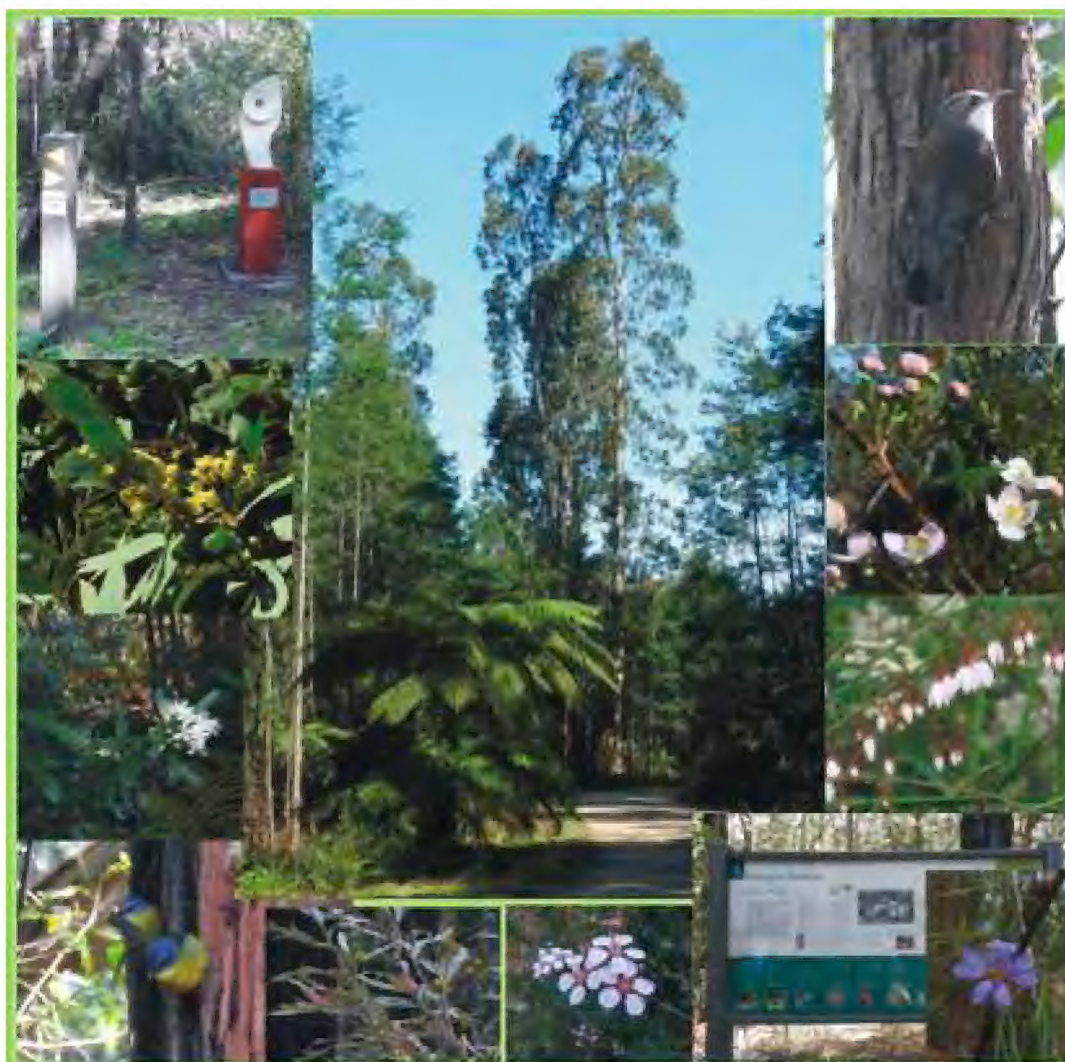
the main group and went searching for it. We were so glad we did as the tall shrubs were just coming into flower and had attracted some stunning looking Crescent Honeyeaters. We were able to just stand beside the road and watch these birds carefully go over all the flower heads one-by-one, calling in the clear afternoon air and giving fantastic views. However, the lunch-spot wasn't without highlights as for those venturing into the bush to follow the clear calls of the whipbirds, they were rewarded with great views of a pair.

When leaving the area, Lee spotted small birds right beside the track. When we stopped, backed up and were watching one some metres away in the vegetation, suddenly he noticed again that there was a Spotted Pardalote next to a nest hole on the road cutting, not more than two metres from the car! What a great sight.

Calling frogs, interesting Golden-tailed Spiny Ants (*Polyrhachis* sp) a few fungi as well as the many plants and birds gave people plenty to keep them interested the whole day. — **Rog Standen**

For those interested, the bird list is given below.

Bird List for Bunyip State Forest, 17th September 2017		
Fan-tailed Cuckoo	Spotted Pardalote	Magpie-lark
White-throated Treecreeper	Lewin's Honeyeater	Tree Martin
Red Wattlebird	Rose Robin	Dusky Woodswallow
Australian Raven	Grey Fantail	Grey Shrike-thrush
Little raven	Kookaburra	Scarlet Robin
Galah	Grey Currawong	New Holland Honeyeater
Golden Whistler	Pied Currawong	Crescent Honeyeater
Magpie	Satin Bowerbird	Eastern Spinebill
Brown-headed Honeyeater	Crimson Rosella	Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Red-browed Finch	Eastern Rosella	Olive-backed Oriole
Eastern Whipbird	Brown Thornbill	Grey Butcherbird



Main picture: scene near Lawsons Falls. Clockwise from top left: sculpture at Nangara Reserve; White-throated Treecreeper; *Boronia muelleri*; *Bauera rubioides*; *Dampiera stricta*; Nangara Reserve noticeboard; *Euromyrtus ramosissima*; *Grevillea barklyeana*; Eastern Yellow Robins; *Phebalium bilobum*; *Acacia obliquinerva*.

Peninsula Field Naturalists Club Inc

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month with a field trip the following Saturday. Further information and current Programme of Activities can be found at our website.

President:
Coralie Davies

All correspondence to
Secretary
Judy Smart

Annual Subs due July

Adult	\$30
Concession	\$25

Treasurer:
Linda Edwards

Newsletter edited by Lee Denis

www.peninsulafieldnaturalists.org.au

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